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The CIA's role

PRESIDENT Reagan is being urged by advisers to sign an executive order permitting the Central Intelligence Agency to spy on Americans here at home, to infiltrate domestic groups and corporations and to manipulate them.

The president should reject such a dangerous course and perhaps get himself better advisers. The order they are pushing is a threat to civil liberties. It also could lead to a scandal of Watergate proportions and cripple the Reagan administration.

The National Security Act of 1947, which established the CIA, banned it from a police or internal security role in this country. When the agency strayed into domestic spying, as during the Vietnam War, it earned intense public criticism, which lowered its morale and effectiveness.

Thus friends of the agency, such as Sens. Barry Goldwater and Daniel Patrick Moynihan and former CIA Director Stansfield Turner, are arguing that it must stay away from domestic intelligence, which by law is an FBI function. Turner makes this convincing case:

"CIA officers are not trained to operate in the domestic environment, where regard for law is a primary consideration. The ethic of intelligence is to get the job done in spite of local laws. It is unwise and unfair to force CIA operations into the domestic arena. It isn't necessary, either, for that is exactly where FBI officers are trained to operate."

When Reagan's advisers ask him to sign on the dotted line, he should keep Turner's key words in mind: unwise, unfair, unnecessary.